

Happiness or Joy?

June 1970: Family reunion & camping.

Summer, 1976: Water fights in the back yard.

Fall, 1982: Grilling out with other poor couples.

June, 1987: First baby.

July, 1992: First house.

October, 2007: Vacation in the sun; no kids.

Christmas break, 2014: Holiday feast; all the kids home; games and gifts.

Memorable occasions stand out for one reason or another reminding us of happy times. With each happy memory comes stories of laughter, fun, and things that were especially satisfying.

Perhaps one reason that we have those special memories is because those were occasions that were out of the ordinary. In other words, they were temporary. We would like every day to be an “amusement park” day filled with fun and excitement and cotton candy. (Or another tasty food with absolutely no nutritional value.)

Occasions such as these come under the banner of *happiness*.

I do not need to define happiness for you. However, you might not know that the word *happiness* is rooted in *circumstances*. It is a cousin to the word *happen*. (Check it out in a big, thick dictionary.)

Happiness fades, often with the fading light of day. Why? Our circumstances change day by day.

Yet, there are some people who seem to be happy all the time. Nothing gets them down, even when they are down. They seem to be different from everyone else.

I have heard some claim that they have simply *decided to be happy*. I really admire that and think it is good, but sometimes life stinks. I’m looking for something else.

I have heard others talk about their happiness by comparing their life to others. They are not critical, but rather, recognize that they are more fortunate than many. That gives them reason to be happy. I also admire this way of thinking and I think it is good, but I am really looking for something that goes beyond my circumstances.

I have decided to set my eyes on Jesus who is...

The author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

—Hebrews 12:2

What is that joy that Jesus possessed? How was it possible for him to have joy while enduring the pain and shame of the cross?

The joy that Jesus possessed was not based upon circumstances. The pain of the crucifixion did not bring joy, nor did the shame. Yet the pain and shame brought about a good result, our salvation. His joy was in knowing the future result that God had promised.

His joy was not a mere positive attitude. His joy was not mere point of view. His joy was based on something real. He actually grabbed hold of something with substance, God’s promises. That same joy exists for the Christian.

Would you rather possess lasting joy rooted in the promises of God, or the temporary happiness that is merely tied to circumstances? Will you grab hold of God’s promises?

Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

—Hebrews 12:3

Mark Stinnett